KIA OA6

House of Commons
Chambre des Communes
Canada

TL4029

REPORT PRESENTED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION WHICH TRAVELLED ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS TO THE PHILIPPINES, SINGAPORE AND INDONESIA FROM NOVEMBER 6 TO 23, 1987

A parliamentary delegation composed of Members of the House of Commons and headed by the Honourable Steve Paproski, P.C., M.P., Deputy Speaker and Vice-Chairman of the Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, travelled on official business to the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia at the invitation of the respective parliaments of these countries.

In addition to the Honourable Steve Paproski, the delegation included the following persons:

The Hon. Allan Lawrence, P.C., M.P.
Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier, M.P.
Mr. Russell MacLellan, M.P.
Mr. Chris Speyer, M.P.
Mr. Nelson Riis, M.P.

During their visit to the Philippines, Canadian parliamentarians met with senior political officials, including President Corazon Aquino and Vice-President Salvador H. Laurel.

Upon their arrival at the airport in Manila, the delegates were greeted by Ambassador Russell Davidson and by the Joint Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. During the afternoon of November 10, the delegation met with the Speaker of the Senate, the Honourable Jovito Salonga. The meeting proved to be very interesting, as the Speaker was a most informed, intelligent and open politician. The conversation touched on the national and international political scene. Speaker Salonga expressed his concerns about his country's economic situation and the resulting poverty. He outlined the great difficulty his

government had in carrying out agricultural reform. The world economic situation and relations with the United States were also discussed.

Following this visit, delegates were invited to attend a sitting of the Senate, where their presence was duly noted. The Speaker even went so far as to interrupt the proceedings to allow the Senators to greet the Canadian delegates in person and chat with them informally. The delegates then met with the Vice-President of the Philippines, His Excellency Salvador Laurel. They received a very warm and friendly welcome from him.

On November 11, the first item of business for the delegates was to lay a wreath at the monument erected in honour of a hero who fought for Philippine independence. The delegation then boarded an airplane for Pacolod City located on Negros Island, a major sugar producing region. Plummeting sugar prices have clearly had a catastrophic effect on this region. The governor of the Island is currently trying to set up a major development and industrialization program for the region. CIDA is actively involved in this program and Canada is contributing a substantial amount of financial aid, pursuant to a commitment made in February 1986 by the Minister of External Affairs, the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark. During this first meeting with the Island's Governor, the Hon. Steve Paproski announced that CIDA had approved an initial contribution of 500,000 pesos for preliminary studies. The program will be carried out over a period of 15 years. The Hon. Steve Paproski presented a cheque for the promised funds during an afternoon reception.

The visit to Negros Island was especially productive since it gave the delegates an opportunity to tour the site of several pilot projects undertaken to retrain people who have suffered as a result of the economic crisis brought on by the dramatic drop in sugar prices. The Canadian delegates toured a toy factory where each worker is responsible for making a particular toy part. Finished products are destined for the export market.

The Canadian delegation then visited a small family farming operation where maximum use is made of the lands and every effort is made not to use outside products. The farm produces sufficient feed for the animals and satisfies all of the family's food requirements. These small farms also serve as schools where

farmers can receive the training they need to go out and establish their own self-sufficient farming operation. Late in the afternoon, the delegates received a firsthand look at one of the programs developed by women's organizations. Efforts are being made to retrain women and teach them a trade. The delegates toured a bakery operated under the supervision of an extremely dynamic woman.

The Canadian delegates greatly enjoyed their long, but tiring visit to Negros Island, where they were able to see for themselves the initiatives that are been taken to resolve a distressing economic situation. It should also be noted that in addition to retraining the Island's residents, Philippine authorities are also carrying out real reform measures.

On Thursday November 12, the Canadian delegates met with President Corazon Aquino. The informal meeting lasted more than half an hour. The delegates discussed with the President their previous day's visit to Negros Island, as well as the problems experienced by Philippinos. The President explained to the group how difficult it was to strike a balance between extreme right and left-wing forces. Following their visit, the delegates were invited to tour the presidential palace which was once occupied by President Marcos. Mrs. Aquino has, however, refused to make it her home. She has turned the palace into a museum and delegates were able to glimpse the outrageously lavish lifestyle enjoyed by former President Marcos.

During the afternoon of Thursday November 12, the delegates were greeted at the House of Representatives by Deputy Speaker Antonio Cuenco, who had been assuming the duties of Speaker since the latter had undergone a serious operation. Several members of the House of Representatives and a number of commission chairmen joined the Deputy Speaker in a round-table discussion. Canadian and Philippine parliamentarians exchanged views on such parliamentary topics as procedure and the role of commissions. The Honourable Steve Paproski then presented his host with the three-volume Canadian Encyclopedia, a gift from the Parliamentary Librarian. An official presentation had not been possible until this time.

The delegates then met with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Rodolfo Albano, a member of President Marcos' party. Mr. Albano maintained that it was unfair to condemn former President Marcos

since he had done a great deal for the Philippines. Other Opposition members joined in the debate. The Canadian delegates were also invited to participate and were recognized by the Speaker, who interrupted the proceedings, as his Senate counterpart had done.

The Canadian delegates moved on to the floor of the House and chatted with Philippine parliamentarians.

The following day, Friday November 13, the delegates met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Raul S. Manglapus. The meeting lasted only a short time, since its main purpose was the signing of an agreement to provide Canadian aid to the Philippines. Ambassador Davis signed the agreement on behalf of the Canadian government. It provides for an assistance program and an extension of the repayment deadline for the amounts owed to Canada. Following the signing ceremonies, the delegates met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who impressed everyone with his strong, vital presence. He is unquestionably a skilled politician who spent time in exile in the United States during the Marcos years and who visited Canada on several occasions during this period of exile. He expressed his admiration for Canada and for its spirit of openness and democracy. National and international issues were discussed, in particular relations with the United States. Later that afternoon, the delegates departed for Singapore.

On Saturday, November 14, the delegates were greeted by the Vice-President and members of Parliament. The ensuing conversation was informal and views on respective parliamentary systems were exchanged. The Canadian delegates then toured a commission meeting room and the library.

In the evening the delegation met with Canadian businessmen living in Singapore and with citizens of this area who have interests in Canada.

On Sunday November 15, the delegates flew to Jakarta for an official visit which began on Monday morning, November 16. The agenda was very heavy. First of all, the delegates were welcomed by President Kharis Suhud, and four Vice-Presidents. The ensuing talks were very interesting. The President outlined the efforts Indonesia was making to rise above the very serious economic

problems brought on by declining oil prices. The Canadian delegates keen interest in relations with Canada. The Canadian delegates had an opportunity to ask many questions. Mention was made of the membership of both Canada and Indonesia in the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It was also noted that as a rule, delegates from both countries shared similar positions during Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings and debates.

The delegates then attended a working meeting with the senior members of the Commission on Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation. Chairman Sarwo Edhie Wibowo was accompanied by several commission chairmen and by other parliamentarians. The meeting lasted two hours and discussion centred on a wide range of topics. Mention was made of possible co-operation in the energy sector. The Canadian delegates also inquired about Indonesia's oil resources development policy. The Indonesian representatives explained that the country had serious problems in this area but that co-operation between the two countries could have interesting results. They also explained that their commission's primary purpose was to foster parliamentary co-operation with other countries in a wide range of fields.

They pointed out that for them co-operation should include culture as well as the economy, industry, technology, etc. Questioned by the Canadian delegates they explained that Indonesia belonged to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and that the main purpose of the ASEAN was precisely that: to develop cooperation in that part of the world.

Asked about the difficulties faced by a country as densely populated and geographically dispersed as Indonesia, the Indonesian parliamentarians responded that this was indeed a serious problem, and that communications, including satellite communications, were of primary importance to them. They suggested this as an area where co-operation could be developed between their country and Canada. Of all their concerns, the Indonesians told us, education ranked first. They are using the various media to promote and improve education.

Asked about the five-year plans and deregulation of businesses, the Indonesian delegates explained that their government had taken steps to encourage trade and the development of small enterprises. They said how important it was for them to find and develop new markets. They expressed the hope that our trade relations already good, would become even better in the future.

Asked if they were interested in nuclear energy, one of the Indonesians explained that he had been to Canada and had been very impressed by the CANDU reactor. He added however that Japan, the United States and Germany were also eager to supply nuclear facilities.

Asked about Indonesia's relations with other Islamic countries the Chairman replied that although Indonesia had a Muslim majority, its policies were Indonesian, not necessarily Islamic. When a Canadian delegate enquired about Indonesia's relations with Iran and Iraq, he was told that Indonesia maintained relations with both and took no sides in the war. Indonesia attends the Islamic conference as an observer only, to demonstrate that Islam does not dominate its political life.

After this long and interesting working session, the delegates went to the Foreign Affairs Ministry to meet Dr. Mochtar Kusuma-Atmadja, the Foreign Minister, who impressed the Canadian delegates with his energy, his open-mindedness and his frankness. He explained Indonesia's position on US policies in south-west Asia. He strongly emphasized that he was not at all apprehensive about Communism and that American bases in the Philippines were not Indonesia's bulwark against Communists. He spoke eloquently, observing that he was accustomed to teaching at the university.

After meeting the Foreign Minister, the delegates met the Planning and Development Minister, Dr Sumarlil. In answer to questions from the delegation, he explained that the government had to adopt realistic policies and these required planning. He too stressed the essential role of education for Indonesians. Naturally the question of the oil industry was raised, and the Minister noted that State ownership of the wells made planning that much easier.

In the afternoon the Canadians met the Finance Minister, who also expressed himself very freely about the country's financial situation: Indonesia has a sizable debt. He explained how the drop in the price of oil had had dramatic consequences for the Indonesian economy, to such a degree that devaluation had become necessary. He described the country's 10% VAT, which had proved widely accepted and had streamlined the bureaucracy. The government had also reduced income tax to stimulate investment and economic activity.

On Tuesday, November 17, the delegates were up at 3:30 in the morning to catch an early flight for the long trip to Dili on the Island of Timor, where the government of Indonesia has been accused of violating human rights and freedoms. The delegation was met in Dili by the Governor, and after the usual exchanges of courtesies the Canadians asked him some very direct questions. They wanted to get an idea of the validity of the allegations that had been made about human rights abuses. The Governor, a true diplomat, explained at great length that there was no real problem: certain groups, especially those remote from the main centres, did not always understand the reasons for certain laws. He did say, however, that people's movements were monitored, on the grounds that it allowed the government to prevent mobs surging into areas where there was little chance of finding work. In his view, the criticisms of the government were due to a variety of misunderstandings. He emphasized the efforts being made to develop the region and enable the population to receive a better education. The delegates were then given a tour of the village of Dili and the surrounding area, where they observed that the people were poor, numerous and mostly very young.

In the evening, the delegation met Dili's priest and a Belgian missionary. They had dinner with the delegates and were able to answer further questions on the reality of human rights in Timor. From their responses, this did not seem to be a subject of much concern.

The priest kindly offered to celebrate Mass for the Canadians the following morning at 6:00. Afterwards they left on a tour of the region by bus, ending up at a village some forty kilometres away where they met local officials and asked them questions. The major problem there was irrigation, with all that it implies for rural development.

After the expedition, the delegates toured the university in Dili, where they found the students very friendly. The University offers courses in agriculture, the social and political sciences and administration. Lastly, the delegation was, at the request of its members, taken to see the prison.

Officials there explained that they were holding 70 political prisoners, by which they meant people guilty of an attempt on the country's security; once in prison, however, all inmates are

treated the same way. The delegates were able to tour the prison, and got the impression that the inmates were not particularly ill-treated. They appeared to be well fed and the institution well run, and prison authorities said they were entitled to visitors. Obviously a superficial impression was all that could be gained, since on top of everything else there was the language problem: the officials spoke Indonesian and the person providing the interpretation spoke English but was not, properly speaking, an interpreter. In the afternoon the delegates left for Den Pasar.

The day after their arrival they were received by the Deputy Governor, with whom they discussed local problems. In Bali these are obviously very different from problems in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago.

It is safe to say that these official visits to both the Philippines and Indonesia had a definite political impact. There had not been a visit by Canadian parliamentarians to the Philippines since the end of the Marcos régime, and the most recent parliamentary visit to Indonesia was in 1972.

This recent visit gave Canada an opportunity to reaffirm its ties with these countries, ties which both are eager to maintain and develop.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Paproski, P.C., M.P.
Deputy Chairman of the
Committees of the Whole House
(Deputy Speaker)